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Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA)  
Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, San José, Costa Rica

## DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

### USAID/OFDA Helps Strengthen Caribbean USAR Capabilities

USAID/OFDA's Regional Disaster Assistance Program (RDAP) helps countries build local capacities and achieve sustainability in disaster management, including urban search-and-rescue (USAR) capabilities.

The recent Collapsed Structures Rescue Course, held in Barbados from February 25 to March 2, was a milestone in the Caribbean USAR capacity-building program. For the first time since the inception of USAID/OFDA's Caribbean USAR program in 2007, the course was delivered by Caribbean instructors. Previous USAR trainings in the Caribbean depended on instructors from Fairfax and Los Angeles counties, in the United States, along with instructors from Colombia, Costa Rica, and Mexico.

During the first year of the Caribbean USAR program, 12 people from Barbados, Jamaica, and Saint Kitts and Nevis received instruction in light-level collapsed structures rescue.

Today, more than 120 people from 12 Caribbean countries have been trained as USAR light-level technicians to International Search and Rescue Advisory Group standards. Additionally, 20 of these individuals have been certified as

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Photo by Clive Lorde, USAID/OFDA

*Barbados Fire and Rescue Service and Barbados Defence Force personnel participate in the first USAID/OFDA-supported Collapsed Structures Rescue Course using Caribbean instructors. Previous courses relied on instructors from the United States and Latin America.*

## DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

### USAID/OFDA Seeks Partners for Urban Disaster Risk Reduction Projects

USAID/OFDA recently published two annual program statements (APS) seeking proposals from partners both to reduce disaster risk in vulnerable urban areas of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and to build disaster preparedness and response capacity in Haiti, respectively.

Through the \$7.5 million APS "Operationalizing a Neighborhood Approach to Reduce Urban Disaster Risk in Latin America and the Caribbean," USAID/OFDA seeks to reduce disaster risks to populations living in hazard-prone and marginalized urban settlements.

The neighborhood approach fea-

tures sustainable, participatory planning methodologies and implementation of risk mitigation measures.

April 4 is the deadline for urban disaster risk reduction grant concept papers; the APS closing date is August 31. For complete information about the regional APS, search for Funding Opportunity Number APS-OFDA-13-000005 on the web site [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov).

Through the \$750,000 APS "Haiti Disaster Risk Reduction Capacity Building," USAID/OFDA aims to strengthen the capacity of Haiti's Directorate of Civil Protection (DPC) at the departmental level, via institutional support complementing the current efforts of the Government of Haiti (GoH)

and international community, as well as implementing a rapid response mechanism to help meet urgent needs post-disaster.

The key direct beneficiaries of the program will be DPC's departmental technical coordinators, departmental officials with roles in disaster response, GoH ministry officials, Red Cross delegates, and volunteers working with the DPC in the departments where projects will be funded.

The deadline for Haiti grant applications is April 25. For complete information about the Haiti APS, search for Funding Opportunity Number APS-OFDA-13-000009 on [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov).



Photo by Clive Lorde, USAID/OFDA

**Participants in the recent Collapsed Structures Rescue Course in Barbados take a break from field practice activities.**

## Building Caribbean USAR Capabilities

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USAR instructors.

With the completion of the recent course, Barbados now boasts a total of 36 USAR technicians trained to carry out light-level USAR operations. During the course, a number of potential instructors were identified. The eventual graduation of these candidates as certified instructors will position Barbados to undertake its own USAR training, in accordance with international standards.

Through the RDAP, USAID/OFDA promotes the advancement of national USAR programs, certification of national teams, and development of national and regional procedures for these teams to mobilize and help neighboring countries in times of need. USAID/OFDA specialists also help to develop and carry out training exercises and simulations to practice and refine USAR skills.

Priority countries for this coming year include Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago. In late May, USAID/OFDA plans to meet with the USAR administrative and operational focal points from these four countries to discuss how the RDAP can better support national and regional efforts to strengthen USAR capabilities.

However, the future of USAR preparedness lies not only in training and preparing teams for rescuing people from the rubble. Countries in the region and around the world are becoming more urbanized. With increasing urbanization comes increasing vulnerability. As nations' capacities and abilities to respond increase, countries must also work to reduce their vulnerabilities.

Using lessons learned during the 2010 Haiti earthquake response and in line with the United Nations' "Making Cities Resilient Campaign," USAID/OFDA focuses not only on strengthening USAR response capacities, but also on promoting disaster risk reduction activities in vulnerable urban areas. This includes improving land use and planning regulations and helping to develop more appropriate building codes so that structures are able to withstand hazards.

In the months and years to come, in close collaboration with the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency, USAID/OFDA will continue to support the Caribbean countries in reducing urban risks and strengthening national USAR capabilities before, during, and after disasters.

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## DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

### USAID/OFDA Supports OCHA Regional Office

USAID/OFDA is providing funding support to the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) regional office for LAC.

The regional office, based in Panama with support to OCHA offices in Colombia and Haiti, works to strengthen national disaster preparedness and response capabilities in close coordination with humanitarian and government partners in 42 countries and territories in LAC.

With a network of national disaster-response advisers and information management assistants located in 12 countries, OCHA provides in-country training and advice to national disaster response authorities.

The office also facilitates workshops and training for staff from the U.N., non-governmental organizations, and governments to improve understanding of disaster response and preparedness tools.

With USAID/OFDA support, in 2013 OCHA plans to focus on strengthening preparedness at the country level to ensure that key humanitarian teams are better equipped to lead emergency responses. The high turnover of national authorities and humanitarian partners, coupled with an increase in disaster events and vulnerabilities, means disaster preparedness will remain crucial. Greater engagement with the region's emerging donors and potential leaders in disaster relief is also a priority.

Specifically, the \$500,000 in USAID/OFDA funding support for 2013 aims to strengthen OCHA's capacity to rapidly deploy disaster management consultants to provide coordination support during disaster responses in countries where OCHA does not currently have a sustained presence.

## COMING UP

### Forum on Integral Fire Management

USAID/OFDA is sponsoring the Latin American Forum on Integral Fire Management, scheduled for April 4 and 5 in Cali, Colombia. The forum, organized with assistance from USAID/OFDA disaster risk management specialist Luisa Alfaro, will provide an opportunity for firefighters in the region to share experiences and best practices in preventing and controlling forest fires.

### National USAR Exercise in Chile

USAID/OFDA is providing technical assistance to Chile for a national USAR mobilization exercise scheduled from April 12 to 14 in Santiago.

### Bolivian Firefighters Mobilization Exercise

USAID/OFDA is providing technical assistance to Bolivia for the Fourth National Forest Firefighter Brigade Mobilization Exercise, scheduled from April 18 to 21 in Santa Cruz.

### USAID/OFDA Workshops for MDROs

USAID/OFDA is planning three workshops with U.S. mission disaster relief officers (MDROs) in the LAC region to discuss USAID/OFDA disaster management capabilities. A workshop for MDROs in South America is scheduled from April 24 to 25 in Lima, Peru; a workshop for MDROs in the Caribbean is scheduled for May 8 and 9 in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic; and a workshop for MDROs in Central America and Mexico is scheduled for May 29 and 30 in Antigua, Guatemala.